

## **Executive Summary**

### **Joseph L. DeCaro**

Joseph L. DeCaro is a Lieutenant Colonel on active duty in the United States Air Force. He was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois and entered military service in July of 1986 when he started basic training at the United States Air Force Academy. He is testifying in his personnel capacity and his views do not represent those of the United States Air Force, the Department of Defense, or the current Administration.

During the 2000 general election he was on a forecast temporary duty assignment to Hunter Army Airfield in Georgia and voted via absentee ballot and that year. Most of his deployed unit had cast are votes via absentee ballot and because of the electoral contentions in the state of Florida that year, were concerned their votes might not been counted that year.

From August to December of 2002, he was deployed to United States Central Command Combined Air Operations Center and cast an absentee ballot for the general election that year.

In December of 2003, he was deployed again to United States Central Command. This was a one-year deployment and he knew he would have to cast an absentee ballot. He requested this ballot during his R & R leave in the spring of 2004 via the branch office of the county Supervisor of Elections. In September of 2004, during the period of time when the ballot should have arrived the tempo of operations was very busy and the ballot did not arrive when it was supposed to.

One way mail, both to and from home to the deployed location could take up to take three weeks to arrive. Lieutenant Colonel DeCaro had excellent telephone and internet connectivity and at the beginning of October contacted the Office of the Supervisor of Elections via the link on their website requesting the status of his absentee ballot. The office e-mailed back that his ballot had been mailed out and that he should have received it a month earlier. At that point he established phone communication with the branch office of the county Supervisor of Elections. He was informed that the military and United States Postal systems were the only methods of sending and receiving ballots and the office immediately mailed out another ballot via priority mail and e-mailed electronic copies for me to review. The Supervisor of Elections also personally became involved and provided status updates. The ballot arrived in time for it to be mailed back so that is arrived approximately two weeks before Election Day.

While communications at this location were excellent, ballot issues added stressors to a combat support and operations environment. This compounded normal deployed family stressors in addition to an active hurricane season.

This situation is unique to Lieutenant Colonel DeCaro and he cannot comment on the Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine who is at a forward operating base without dedicated phone lines, no web connectivity and gets mail once a week.

## **Testimony**

### **Joseph L. DeCaro**

Chairman Schumer, Ranking Member Bennet, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak here today.

My name is Joseph L. DeCaro. I am Lieutenant Colonel on active duty in the United States Air Force. I was born and raised in Chicago, Illinois and entered military service in July of 1986 when I started basic training at the United States Air Force Academy. I am testifying in my personnel capacity and my views do not represent those of the United States Air Force, the Department of Defense, or the current Administration.

Even before I was old enough to vote, I have believed that it is important for every American to be aware of who their elected officials are, for the electorate to stay informed on local, state, and national issues and to know the positions of their elected officials on these issues. I have always done this myself and I have done my best to cast my ballot(s) during primary and general elections. However, as a member of the armed forces I have not always been home on/or shortly before Election Day.

During the 2000 general election I was on a temporary duty assignment to Hunter Army Airfield in Georgia. This was a forecast temporary duty and I requested an absentee ballot and that was how I voted that year. While conducting post mission paperwork, members of my unit and I sat on the old B-47 alert ramp at the airfield and listed to election results via FM radio. Most of us had cast are votes via absentee ballot and as the process of determining the outcome dragged on, and concerns over military absentee ballots were raised, we became concerned our votes might not be counted. While I do believe our votes did count, it was frustrating to think that consideration and/or attempts were made to disenfranchise military members whose efforts protect and ensure that this very thing doesn't happen to other United States citizens.

From August to December of 2002, I was deployed to Prince Sultan Air Base Saudi Arabia as the Task Force Five liaison officer to the United States Central Command Combined Air Operations Center. This was a well established location and actually had an additional duty voting assistance officer. It was through the voting assistance officer that I received and cast an absentee ballot for the general election that year.

In December of 2003, I was deployed to Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar as the United States Central Command Joint Search and Rescue Center Director. This was a one-year deployment and I knew I would not be home to cast my ballot in person. During my R & R leave during the spring of 2004, I went to the branch office of the county Supervisor of Elections and requested an absentee ballot. During the months of August and September the tempo of operations was very busy and I had to take a trip forward to Djibouti (in the Horn of Africa) and a trip forward to Baghdad, Iraq. Both trips were several days in length and upon return from each I expected my

ballot to have arrived, but that was not the case. It was not uncommon for mail, one-way to and from home to take three weeks to arrive. As the end of September approached I was getting concerned that I might not have enough time to for my ballot to make it in before Election Day. Fortunately, the telephone and internet connectivity of my deployed location was excellent. In the beginning of October, I contacted the Office of the Supervisor of Elections via the link on their website and requested the status of my absentee ballot. The office e-mailed back that my ballot had been mailed out and that I should have received it a month earlier. At that point, I called home base phone operator via the Defense Switching Network and had them forward me to the branch office of the county Supervisor of Elections. I explained who I was and gave a synopsis of the e-mail traffic. The office was extremely helpful, but even this era of modern communication, my only avenue for voting was via a hard copy absentee ballot that would go through the military and United States Postal systems. With that as the constraint, the office immediately mailed out another ballot via priority mail and e-mailed electronic copies for me to review and shorten the turn-around time once the ballot arrived. The Supervisor of Elections, Mrs. Hollarn at the time, also personally e-mailed me about what was happening. Luckily, the absentee ballot arrived about a week after the phone call and I sent it back the same duty day. Mrs. Hollarn e-mailed me a week later to let me know that my ballot had arrived. That was approximately two weeks before Election Day. I am grateful for all the help the Office of the Supervisor of Elections provided and for the efforts and personal interest of Mrs. Hollarn.

While on this deployment I was fortunate enough to have continuous and reliable communications and that was key in being able to vote that year. But this was most certainly an added stressor to the environment in which I was working. Every moment I spent working, researching and coordinating with stateside resources in able to cast my ballot was against any all personnel time off. The mission is and always must be the main focus.

Being deployed to support and conduct combat operations is difficult as it is. I still had a family back home to worry about, and in addition to the normal trials and tribulations that are associated with military life, my wife and daughter were dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Ivan during this period. A storm which caused damage to our home that I still had to repair when I returned from this deployment.

I cannot comment on the Soldier, Sailor, Airman or Marine who is at a forward operating base without dedicated phone lines, no web connectivity and gets mail once a week. I think every American should do whatever they can to cast their ballot and make their voice heard. As with many other citizens, I will continue to do this, but there should be a better way in which to cast a ballot while deployed.

This concludes my prepared remarks. I am happy to answer any questions.

# BIOGRAPHY

## *United States Air Force*

USAF Special Operations School  
Alison Building, 357 Tully Street  
Hurlburt Field, FL 32544  
DSN 579-6843 FAX 579-1883

### **LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOSEPH L. DECARO**

Lieutenant Colonel Joseph L. DeCaro is Director of Operation for the United States Air Force Special Operations School (USAFSOS) located at Hurlburt Field, Florida. He directs an organization of 50+ military, civilian, and contractor personnel. The school was founded in 1967 to meet USSOCOM professional education requirements. USAFSOS faculty and staff present 21 formal courses in subject areas of command and control, force protection, and cultural and threat awareness by region to over 9,000 Department of Defense, Department of State, NATO, Allied, and other government agency students annually. With an annual budget of \$2.5 million, the school develops courses to meet specific special operations needs and ensures both relevancy and currency of curriculum.

Lieutenant Colonel DeCaro graduated from the US Air Force Academy in 1990. He is a command pilot with over 2,600 flying hours in the UH-1H/N and MH-53J/M aircraft and has flown combat missions in Iraq. He has held a variety of assignments, which include pilot, instructor pilot, flight evaluator, and operations officer; as well as staff assignments at Headquarters, Air Force Special Operations Command and the Combined Forces Air Component of United States Central Command. His previous assignment was as the 20<sup>th</sup> Special Operations Squadron Operations Officer, Hurlburt Field Florida. Lieutenant Colonel DeCaro assumed his present duties on 1 November 2009.

#### **EDUCATION:**

1990 Bachelor of Science, US Air Force Academy, Colorado Springs, Colorado  
1996 Squadron Officer School, Maxwell AFB, Alabama  
2000 Master of Aeronautical Science, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University,  
2003 US Air Force Command and Staff College (correspondence)  
2009 Air War College (correspondence)

#### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

1. 1990-1991, Student, Undergraduate Helicopter Training, Fort Rucker, Alabama
2. 1991-1993, Pilot and Aircraft Commander, Detachment 5, 37<sup>th</sup> Air Rescue Squadron, Malmstrom AFB, Montana
3. 1993-1994, Student, MH-53J Mission Qualification Training, 551<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Squadron, Kirtland AFB, New Mexico
4. 1994-1997, Aircraft Commander, Plans Officer, 20th Special Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida
5. 1997-1998, Aircraft Commander, Instructor Pilot, War Readiness Flight Commander, 31<sup>st</sup> Special Operations Squadron, Osan AB, Republic of Korea
6. 1998-1999, Weapons and Tactics Flight Commander, 16<sup>th</sup> Operations Support Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida
7. 1999-2001, Combat Flight Commander, 20th Special Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida

8. 2001-2003, Chief, Rotary-Wing Contingency Plans, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida
9. 2003-2004, Director, United States Central Command Joint Search and Rescue Center, Al Udeid AB, Qatar
10. 2004-2006, Chief, Rescue Division, Air Force Special Operations Command, Hurlburt Field, Florida
11. 2006-2008, Assistant Operations Officer/Operations Officer, 20th Special Operations Squadron, Hurlburt Field, Florida
12. 2008-Present, Director of Operations, USAF Special Operations School, Hurlburt Field, Florida

**MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS:**

Bronze Star Medal  
Defense Meritorious Service Medal  
Meritorious Service Medal  
Air Medal  
Aerial Achievement Medal with one oak leaf cluster  
Air Force Commendation Medal with five oak leaf clusters  
Joint Service Commendation Medal  
Joint Service Achievement Medal

**FLIGHT INFORMATION:**

Rating: Command Pilot  
Flight Hours: 2,600+  
Aircraft Flown: UH-1H/N, MH-53J/M

**EFFECTIVE DATES OF PROMOTION:**

Second Lieutenant	May 30, 1990
First Lieutenant	May 30, 1992
Captain	May 30, 1994
Major	Jul 1, 2001
Lieutenant Colonel	Jun 1, 2006

(Current as of May 2009)